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12356: DECL: CADR

AGS: PREL. AF. US

SUBJECT: (S) AFGHANISTAN: BRIEFING THE PRESS ON PARTIAL

THE FALL OF SOVIET TROOPS

REF: STAFF 303306

1. (S) REPORTED ACTIVITIES AT SHINDAND AND ANNOUNCED

1. (S) REPORTED ACTIVITIES RE: SOVIET INTENTION TO ALLOW PRESS COVERAGE OF WITHDRAWAL OF

SIX SOVIET REGIMENTS FROM AFGHANISTAN INDICATE THE

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REF ID: A66582
SCVIETS ARE INTENT ON MAKING HEADLINES THAT WILL SHIFT
CNUS FOR LACK OF PROGRESS TOWARD A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT
AWAY FROM THEMSELVES, PUT PRESSURE ON PAKISTAN AND THE US
FOR SOME "RECIPROCAL" GESTURE, AND UNDERCUT SUPPORT FOR
THE ANNUAL UNGA AFGHANISTAN RESOLUTION. WE INTEND TO
COMMENT PUBLICLY ON THE SOVIET WITHDRAWAL ONCE WE HAVE

HEAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE A FULL ASSESSMENT

WISH TO WORK WITH RESPONSIBLE AND FRIENDLY REPORTERS WHO WILL BE COVERING THE EVENT TO ARM THEM WITH ENOUGH INFORMATION THAT WILL A) PUT THE SIX REGIMENT WITHDRAWAL IN THE CONTEXT OF A CONTINUING SOVIET EFFORT TO UPGRADE ITS MILITARY CAPABILITIES IN AFGHANISTAN, AND B) PERMIT THEM TO ASSESS THE NATURE OF THE PARADE OF TANKS/ TROOPS.

2. (U) ADDRESSEE POSTS SHOULD SEEK TO BACKGROUND FRIENDLY

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ON JULY 28, GENERAL SECRETARY GORBACHEV ANNOUNCED PLANS TO WITHDRAW SIX SOVIET REGIMENTS -- ONE TANK, THREE AIR DEFENSE AND TWO MOTORIZED RIFLE REGIMENTS-- BY YEAR'S END. A SOVIET PRESS SPOKESMAN HINTED THAT THESE WITHDRAWALS MIGHT BEGIN ON OR ABOUT OCTOBER 6. CONSTRUCTION OF REVIEWING STANDS AT SHINDAND AIRBASE AND RECENT EXPEDITIOUS APPROVAL AND ISSUANCE OF ENTRY VISAS

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--IN ANNOUNCING THE SIX REGIMENT WITHDRAWAL, GORBACHEV STATED IT WAS MEANT "TO ACCELERATE A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT" AND SHOULD BE MET WITH A RECIPROCAL STEP IN THE FORM OF

CURTAILMENT OF "OUTSIDE INTERFERENCE".

--ON JULY 30, TWO DAYS AFTER GORBACHEV'S VLADIVOSTOK SPEECH, THE UN-SPONSORED NEGOTIATIONS RESUMED IN GENEVA. THE ROUND ENDED ON AUGUST 8 WITHOUT ANY PROGRESS HAVING BEEN MADE ON THE CENTRAL ISSUE OF A COMPREHENSIVE SOVIET WITHDRAWAL TIMETABLE. NO DATE WAS SET FOR THE RESUMPTION OF THESE TALKS.

--IF GORBACHEV SOUGHT TO FASTEN A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT, THE PUBLISHING OF A SHORT WITHDRAWAL TIMETABLE FOR THE COMPLETE WITHDRAWAL OF SOVIET TROOPS SHOULD HAVE BEEN PRESENTED AT GENEVA. THIS IS WHAT THE UNGA HAS DEMANDED.

THE PARTIES AT GENEVA HAVE AGREED ON THE ISSUE OF THE CESSATION OF SO-CALLED "OUTSIDE INTERFERENCE". IF THIS TOKEN WITHDRAWAL IS MEANT TO SIGNAL A WILLINGNESS TO GET SOVIET TROOPS OUT OF AFGHANISTAN, IT IS WELCOME, BUT THE NEXT STEP SHOULD BE A PROMPT TABLING OF A COMPREHENSIVE TIMETABLE FOR THE EARLY WITHDRAWAL OF ALL SOVIET FORCES.

--IFIS TROOP WITHDRAWAL GESTURE APPEARS TO BE MILITARILY INSIGNIFICANT, AND DESIGNED PRIMARILY TO UNDERCUT SUPPORT FOR THE ANNUAL AFGHANISTAN RESOLUTION IN THE UNGA.

--SINCE THE SOVIET INVASION ALMOST SEVEN YEARS AGO, THE SOVIETS HAVE STEADILY UPGRADED THEIR WEAPONRY AND ALTERED THEIR ORDER OF BATTLE TO IMPROVE THEIR COUNTER-INSURGENCY WARFARE CAPABILITY. THEY ARE RELYING INCREASINGLY ON LIGHT AIRBORNE FORCES RATHER THAN HEAVY MOTORIZED

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COLUMNS; THEY HAVE INTENSIFIED AMBUSH AND INTERDICTION OPERATIONS ALONG THE BORDER AREAS AIMED AT STYMIEING INSURGENT MOVEMENT AND SUPPLY, AND FOR THIS PURPOSE ARE

USING MORE AIR AND ARTILLERY POWER, CONVOY AMBUSHES, AND SMALL UNIT ATTACKS.

---WHEN THE SOVIETS INVADDED AFGHANISTAN IN 1979, THE IFSCOPS THEY USED WERE LARGELY RESERVE UNITS FROM CENTRAL ASIA, WITH AN ORDER OF BATTLE GENERALLY CORRESPONDING TO THAT PREVAILING IN THE SOVIET FORCES. THESE UNITS WERE EQUIPPED FOR CONVENTIONAL MILITARY WARFARE AGAINST MODERN ARMIES, AND WERE ACCOMPANIED BY ARMOR, AIR DEFENSE, ARTILLERY ETC.

--SINCE THAT TIME, THE SOVIETS HAVE STEADILY TRIED, WITHIN THE NUMERICAL LIMITS THEY HAVE SET FOR THEMSELVES, TO FIELD A FIGHTING FORCE THAT IS MORE APPROPRIATE TO COUNTER-INSURGENCY. THEY HAVE INCREASED AND MODERNIZED THEIR FLEET OF APC'S, INTRODUCED ADDITIONAL AIRPOWER, INCLUDING THE SU-25, AND INCREASED THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL BETTER TRAINED IN COUNTERINSURGENCY.

--THE SOVIETS ARE CONTINUING TO REFINE THEIR DEPLOYMENTS IN AFGHANISTAN TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THIS TACTICAL REFOCUS. OVER THE LAST TWO YEARS THERE HAS BEEN A SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF SOVIET SPECIAL PURPOSE FORCES, THE SPETSNAZ. THERE ARE NOW SOME 4000 OF THESE HIGHLY TRAINED TROOPS IN AFGHANISTAN, PERHAPS EQUALE THE 1983 LEVEL.

--THE SPETSNAZ REPORTEDLY GET PRIORITY HELICOPTER LIFTS AND HAVE PLENTY OF ARMORED TRANSPORTATION, TWO FACTORS WHICH ARE IMPORTANT FORCE-MULTIPLIERS. THE SOVIETS ALSO

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HAVE MADE SOME IMPROVEMENTS IN MOUNTAIN WARFARE, ALTHOUGH
USSR MEDIA REPORTS STILL ACKNOWLEDGE DEFICIENCIES IN THIS
ARENA, EVEN AFTER SOME SEVEN YEARS OF WAR IN AFGHANISTAN.

ARINA, EVEN AFTER SOME SEVEN YEARS OF WAR IN AFGHANISTAN --THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE SIX SOVIET REGIMENTS IDENTIFIED BY GORBACHEV MAY BE AN INTEGRAL PART OF THIS CONTINUING SOVIET EFFORT TO RESEAPE ITS AFGHANISTAN EXPEDITIONARY ARMY INTO A MORE EFFECTIVE ANTI-GUERILLA FORCE.

--FOUR OF THE SIX REGIMENTS -- 3 AIR DEFENSE, 1 TANK --
HAVE NOT BEEN ACTIVE IN COMBAT. THE AFGHAN RESISTANCE

CLEARLY HAS NO AIR FORCE; THE SOVIETS' SOLE REMAINING TANK REGIMENT HAS LONG BEEN UNDERSTRENGTH AND ITS TANKS DISPERSED AND LARGELY EMPLOYED IN STATIC DEFENSE ROLES WHERE MORTARS AND MINES WOULD BE MORE APPROPRIATE.

--WE WILL STUDY THE AVAILABLE EVIDENCE AS THESE ALLEGED WITHDRAWALS UNFOLD. OUR PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT, HOWEVER, LEADS US TO QUESTION WHETHER THERE WILL BE A NET REDUCTION IN SOVIET MILITARY CAPABILITIES IN AFGHANISTAN.

REDUCTION IN SOVIET MILITARY CAPABILITIES IN AFGHANISTAN:
--RAATHER, THIS HAS THE HALLMARKS OF A PROPAGANDA EXERCISE

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